

Lessons of the Snow

By

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Preached at

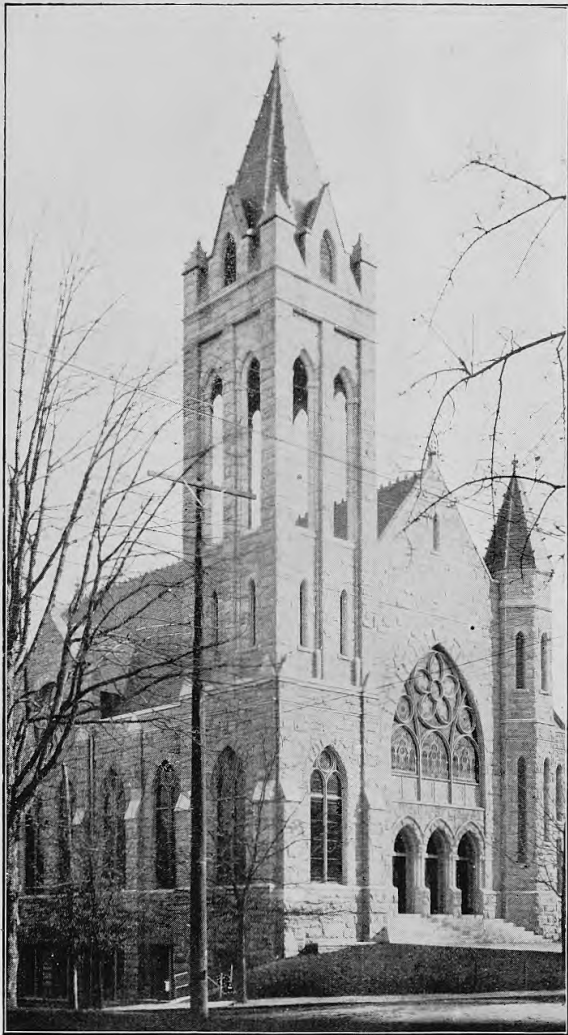
St. Mark Methodist Episcopal Church, South

January 31, 1904

and Published by Request of Congregation



Atlanta
The Blosser Press
1904



St. Mark Church. 778

“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”—Psalm 51.7.

God “saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth.” “He giveth snow like wool.” “Praise the Lord * * * snow and vapor.” “Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?” Let us do so, and see what good things may be brought out of its storehouses.

I.

BEAUTY. The whiteness of snow is the reflection of light from each of its facets or star-points, so that every flake is as a roomful of mirrors.

In “the winter wild” Nature takes off her gorgeous summer dress and autumn’s flaming colors and stands exposed to the rude gaze of all eyes. Then aerial weavers grow busy with looms far above the soiling smoke of earth, and drop down upon her bare shoulders a finished mantle surpassing in purity the fine linen of a bride’s attire. Kings and queens wear robes of ermine, but Nature’s winter dress is more beautiful than all wardrobes designed by skillful modistes and executed by the nimble fingers of painstaking and weary women. On her pale brow is a coronet whose crystals outsparkle the Kohinoor. Great rooms of earthly palaces are covered with costly carpets from India, but the covering of snow is softer and richer, and of the same material are hung on shrub and tree banners outshining Persian tapestry, making the forests gleam as if encircled with necklaces of stars.

The winter servants of Nature have been walking through the hanging gardens of the firmament and dropping down the white petals of blossoms undefiled by human culture. The artists of the air in their lofty studios have been carving and sending down for Nature's halls of statuary the products of their genius whiter than Carrara marble.

The deformities which not even the verdure of spring nor summer's affluent growth could conceal, are hidden; wrinkles are filled, projections softened; valleys seem not so low nor mountains so high; and even the graves of the dead are less painfully emphatic in their outlines under the snow, whose whiteness we trust is typical of the character of our departed friends, whose bodies are sleeping underneath waiting the judgment day.

As the flakes come whirling down, children go mad with delight, the blood of men runs faster, and even horses seem to be more spirited dragging sleighs wherein lover's thoughts keep music with the tinnabulation of the jingling bells.

II.

ORDER AND OBEDIENCE. A snowflake, whatever its model, is uniform in structure. It is built according to a mathematical rule. Its law of unity is never broken. Its sides and lines are arranged at an angle of 60 degrees or some multiple of sixty. Its crystals are either six-pointed stars or hexagonal plates. You never saw a snowflake with five or seven facets or points. There is a bewildering variety of forms, over one thousand having been observed, but all are constructed on the hexiform pattern. Whatever the size of the flakes, varying from one inch to seven-hundredths of an inch in diameter; whether falling as the regular deposit of arctic cold or in some temporary congelation in the tropics; whether descending softly in the calm of night, or blown and tossed as the breath of a howling midwinter hurricane, order rules in its formation, and the strongest microscope testifies absolute obedience to the law of its life.

This obedience is taught in the very word "flake." It means flock. In their multitude and whiteness snowflakes suggests flocks of sheep such as Abraham grazed on the juicy slopes of Canaan or the Australian shepherd leads to the rich meadows of his island continent. In the pastures of the sky the Shepherd marshals his snowy flocks and leads them down to earth; every one of the immense number knows the Master's voice, obeys his command, and lies down in quietness and beauty in the appointed fold.

What a lesson for us! Man is the one disorderly and disobedient element in creation.

He wants to have his own way, and often has it to his destruction. Much trouble, sorrow, remorse, social disturbance, tragedy, and war, come from the spirit of disobedience which kindled rebellion in our first parents when they plucked and ate the forbidden fruit. Order is heaven's first law, and often man's last.

Whatever happiness we are to find on this earth is to be obtained from obedience to God. As well might snowflakes desire to stay in the air or to fall in this or that place, as for us to determine to choose our lot and go resolutely against every thing not in line with reckless inclination or ungovernable will. As the fixed shape of the snowflake manifests undeviating adherence to law, so let our willing obedience show conformation to the higher law framed by divine wisdom for the government of intelligent moral agents. Samuel said to Saul, "Obedience is better than sacrifice." Obedience is the mother of worship. Songs of praise may be tuneful to human ears, but they are hateful to God when proceeding from disobedient hearts and lawless lives. At the wedding feast, Mary, the mother of Jesus, said to the servants, "whatsoever he saith unto you, do." Every snowflake, so orderly, so obedient to the law of its life, says to each of us, "Fear God, and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man."



Washington street, Boston, Jan.

III.

SILENCE. The snow is formed high up in air. Thunder does not cannonade salutes at its birth, nor tornado rock its cradle. Unseen but mighty forces are at work. The sun reaches down to the ocean, and, gathering handsfull of vapor, hurls it through the air. Some condenses as dew, giving drink to flowers and blades of grass. Some descends in copious rain, sprinkling dusty streets, filling wells and streams, and making glad the farmer's heart. Some hardens into hail, angrily striking window panes and scourging leaves from the trees of the wood.

Now comes the last season of the year. The King, looking out of his winter palace, says, "From the residue of vapor given me by the sun, I will make most beautiful children. There shall be no noise of humming wheels or whirling winds. My servants shall be mute." He issues his commands. Silently his artificers gather an atom of moisture, and to this bring other atoms, and thus build up six pointed stars, each a tiara in itself fit to crown the queen of fairies, and then in prodigal unselfishness drop them down to earth for human admiration and instruction.

Still waters run deep. Not the loudest machinery does the best work. A rattling wagon indicates a light load. The noisiest worker is not the most successful. The vociferous fellow may make some think that he is doing much, but when the grain is measured, the man who put his breath into his arms will show that he cut down more wheat.

In the mind of your quiet child may be deep musings, noble thoughts, which clothed in ac-

tion may bring great blessings to the world. Watch their development, help them to mature, and rejoice in their achievements.



IV.

BENEVOLENCE. Snow protects nature from the disrupting elements of frost. Water turning to ice expands with a force of nearly 2,000 pounds to the square inch. Our great boilers are builded to withstand a pressure of about 200 pounds to the square inch, but water freezing develops nearly ten times this expansive force. Thick bombs and cannon have been filled with water and hermetically sealed, and then burst asunder by the tremendous expansion made by freezing. Great cliffs have been broken off from mountains by this power. A plowed field will be completely pulverized by frost. Meadows, and growing wheat, and other vegetation, and country roads, need the protecting influence of the snow. It keeps the cold out; it keeps the warmth in. A thermometer has shown 40 degrees warmer under snow than at the surface.

Nature needs her winter rest. In the morning of the year, she was busy about her spring-cleaning, getting things ready, plowing and planting. In the summer, she panted in fields of new-mown hay, or of wheat golden for the reaper, or of corn flaunting its yellow banners. In autumn, she gathered the rewards of her labor, stripped orchards of their mellow fruit, and shouted thanksgiving songs for the goodness which had crowned the year.

Now the weary mother needs repose. Having done her best for all her children, she, too, would lie down to sleep. The snow, flaky and soft, covers her up, and tucks her in, and keeps out the cold, and so she sleeps, until the sun coming to her relief drives away the ice, and kisses her into wakefulness, when she

rises refreshed, and puts on again her Easter attire of grass and leaf, garlanding her beautiful head with flowers, while the liberated streams ripple their gladness, and returning birds melodize the air. Thus God's "bountiful hand is seen, though gloved in a snowstorm."

In this respect the snow may teach us one of the uses of affliction. Cold at the surface, warm underneath. On the snow a plant will freeze, under it will live and grow. So affliction has two sides. If we stand up against it and fight it, it is stronger than we. It will turn our blood to ice. If we yield to it, if we accept its protective influences, then it is as a covering to us under which the forces of life will gain new strength for richer fruitage, even as crocus and violet live under the snow, and show themselves as the earliest harbingers of advancing spring.





A narrow street from a village in the Himalayas.

V.

IN UNION, STRENGTH. There is power in the aggregate. Units make millions. One snowflake is insignificant; in weight almost nothing; it melts on the finger-tip; a baby's breath dissipates it.

To one flake let others be joined; 100, 1,000, 1,000,000, an uncounted multitude. A dry leaf is covered, a cold window-ledge, a sheltered roof; then the housetops of the village and the great city; then the fields whiten, and the continent. Nothing can withstand its advance. It puts its bridle on the leaping rivers, and says, "Be still," and they obey. It commands the great steamship, "Go not forth," and binds her to the wharf. It overtakes the flying engine with its ponderous train, and laying its soft hand on revolving wheels orders, "Turn not," and machinery submits. It bound Washington and his patriot army at Valley Forge in tighter chains than England could have made. It said to Napoleon at Moscow, "Halt, retreat!" and the heroes of many battle fields were routed by "the white-plumed light infantry of the clouds." His soldiers could charge cossacks and storm forts, but they could not bayonet a snowflake nor cannonade the clouds from which it fell. The Scotch national emblem is the thistle, because a thistle penetrated the foot of a soldier in an invading army stealing up to surprise a fort by night, causing him to cry out, thus alarming the defenders. The Russian national emblem should be not a bear or an eagle, but a snowflake, for it was this that defeated the victor of Austerlitz and Borodino, and slew ninety thousand soldiers on the most disastrous re-

treat in history. But for Russian snowstorms Napoleon might have conquered Wellington at Waterloo.

There is nothing else like it in nature; individually soft, weak; united, aggregated, invincible, irresistible. The only thing comparable to it in human affairs is the ballot—a little piece of paper with certain names on it, written by one man, who as an individual has slight influence in the community. Other un-influential men write names on similar pieces of paper. From Maine to California, from Washington to Texas, the ballots fall like snow, and their aggregate shows the irresistible force of public opinion which pulls down one party, sets up another, and changes the administration of a nation.

The influence of the aggregate should have its best illustration in the Church. A single member may not be able to accomplish much unaided; but let other members be joined, and how strong should be the united column. One congregation may be weak by itself, but in union with other congregations, what might not all do for reforming the community. All the churches of Atlanta might be feeble in an expanded territory, but, combined with all other churches elsewhere, no public sin could hold up its head before them. One church-member may be insignificant as a snowflake, but in hearty union with the twenty-eight millions in this Republic, he and they can destroy gambling, intemperance, Sabbath-breaking, and kindred evils, as surely as the charging snowstorms routed the French army on the plains of Russia.

VI.

PURITY. "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Snow is the whitest natural substance. Its whiteness is not that of a wall, white only on the surface, but it is white within and without, through and through, all over. Thus it symbolizes holiness. At the transfiguration, Christ's raiment was "exceeding white as snow."

If the whiteness of snow is an emblem of purity, scarlet is an emblem of sin, perhaps, because, blood is required to expiate sin. Christ's robe when bearing our sins was scarlet. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." The Hebrew word for scarlet means "double-dyed," twice dipped in dye. Cloth once made scarlet cannot be bleached or whitened. As long as a thread of it remains, it is still scarlet; the very lint of it flashes red. Paper-makers can do nothing with red rags except to make red blotting paper.

Thus scarlet, so fixed in color, upon which bleaching preparations have no effect, is a striking emblem of the deep-seated permanency of sin in the human heart. Self-cleansing is morally impossible. "Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God." No earthly agency can take away sin. No preparation of the chemist can bleach a human soul. The scarlet color of sin is there, double-dyed, all-penetrating, touching every fiber of soul and body, and nothing on earth can transform it into the whiteness of snow. It may be painted over with external morality,

but the ingrained quality is underneath, and cannot be washed out in any earthly Jordan. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?"

There is one way in which the impossible becomes possible. The scarlet of sin can be changed into the white of holiness. The blood of Jesus works the wonderful transformation. "God hath a nitre of grace that can bring not only the redness of scarlet sins, but even the blackness of deadly sins, into its native purity and whiteness again." "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." One of the elders said to John in his vision of heaven, "These are they who came out of great tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

There are two words in Hebrew to express different kinds of washing. One means the washing that cleanses only the surface, as bathing the body. The other signifies the washing which pervades the substance washed, and cleanses it thoroughly as in the proper laundering of clothes. This is the word used in reference to moral purification. "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." "Whiter than snow." It seems that, if one's moral nature were as white as snow, it would be enough, but the prayer is, "whiter than snow." One may be white as snow, and a leper still, as Gehazi went from Elisha white as snow. So grace outdoes nature. "No snow is so white in the eyes of men as a soul cleansed from sin in the sight of God. And yet, a whiter whiteness than this too; for being purged from sin we shall put on the white robe; and this is a whiteness as much



Providence Street, Providence, Rhode Island

whiter than snow as angelical whiteness is more than elemental."

"Wash ME, and I shall be whiter than snow." This individualizes the prayer. David understood the pollution of sin, and had a deep sense of guilt. He felt the impossibility of purification by legal observances. "For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering." His only hope of cleansing was in the grace of God. With profound penitence and strong faith, he cast himself into the fountain for uncleanness, and was washed whiter than snow. Let us realize our sins before God. Let us not try to purify ourselves, but, trusting only in the blood of Jesus, pray each for himself, "Wash me, even me, and I, even I, shall be whiter than snow."



VII.

IMPURITY. Snow may be soiled. The grime of the city, the soot of a thousand chimneys, may settle upon it. The feet of horses may churn it into filthy slush. Swine may root it into mud. All its beauty may become disgusting. We turn from it with loathing, and wish for the sun to drive it out of sight with his hot scourge.

The heart made whiter than snow may become defiled. If we yield to contaminating influences, we are corrupted by the polluting contact. As well might a snowflake say, "I can mix with mire and keep my whiteness," as for a Christian to say, "I'll conform to the world but preserve my purity." One of the definitions of true religion is to keep one's-self "unspotted from the world."

As we leave the church to-day, let us gaze upon the wintry scene, and meditate. Look at the snow in street and gutter, and ask, "Am I like that?" Then, lifting the eye to some angle in a roof where the snow lies yet white and unpolluted, or to some field where it is yet untrod, let us say, "Oh that my soul were as pure as that."

May we so live that when our spirits leave the earth, we may sweep through the gates, and take our places with the saints in light, who "have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole;
I want thee forever to live in my soul;
Break down every idol, cast out every foe;
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Lord Jesus, look down from thy throne in the
 skies,
And help me to make a complete sacrifice;
I give up myself, and whatever I know;
O wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Lord Jesus, thou seest I patiently wait;
I wait, blessed Lord, at thy crucified feet,
By faith, for my cleansing; I see thy blood
 flow;
O wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Lord Jesus, thou seest I patiently wait;
Come now, and within me a new heart create;
To those who have sought thee, thou never
 saidst NO;
O wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.





Ellis Street From Peachtree, Looking East,

